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Department of Agriculture

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# Clean Water

Our Conservation  
Commitment



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**

Soil  
Conservation  
Service



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August 1991

# Clean Water

## Our Conservation Commitment

In the first third of the century, when the American public was barely aware of the importance of water quality, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) began to discover some of the relationships between the way we utilize land and the stability of water supplies. This led to concerted efforts in conservation. Later, as research led to knowledge about what happens to water — how it travels above and below ground, what it carries with it, and how its composition changes as it moves — water quality began to emerge as a key priority for USDA.

Today, everyone is concerned about the water they drink. Agriculture, more than any other industry, depends on water. In his 1990 budget proposal, President Bush recommended a new initiative for enhancing water quality. The President's initiative defines a vigorous effort to protect ground and surface water from potential contamination by agricultural chemicals and wastes. The principal concerns at present are the use of pesticides and management of nutrients.

In its efforts to complement the President's Water Quality Initiative, USDA is implementing new programs and accelerating ongoing programs to address agriculture-related water quality concerns. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) has developed and is implementing a 5-Year Water Quality Plan in support of the USDA initiative. SCS is putting strong emphasis on:

- Maintaining and building strong relationships with farmers and ranchers through local soil and water conservation districts, encouraging a voluntary approach to solving resource problems.
- Continuing to ensure that SCS has well-trained conservation professionals and necessary technology for meeting State and local goals for water quality and quantity.

- Promoting the use of economically feasible and practical conservation measures for protecting water quality and quantity and the economic vitality of American agriculture.
- Coordinating water quality and quantity activities with private sector agriculture; appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies; conservation organizations; and urban communities.



### **SCS objectives are to:**

- Increase technical assistance in areas with concerns about water quality and quantity and demonstrate available technology that will protect or improve water quality.
- Help State water quality management agencies and appropriate State soil and water conservation agencies to develop and implement programs to manage nonpoint source pollution.



*SCS provides increased technical assistance to landowners where water quality concerns exist.*





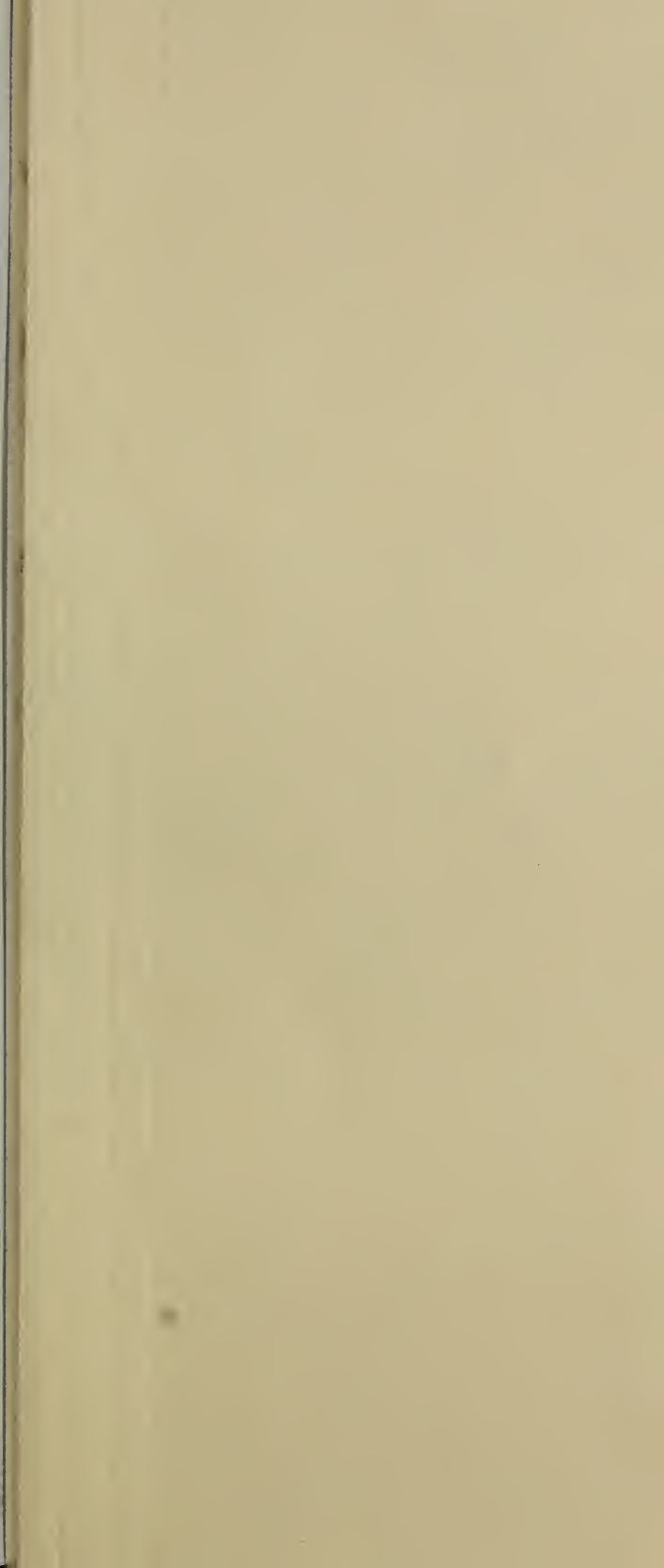
- Evaluate pollutant loads (sediment, pesticides, nutrients, animal waste, salts, and trace elements) to determine the level of contribution from agricultural sources relative to other sources.
- Plan and implement a system of conservation practices to improve water quality and quantity affected by agricultural operations.

- Evaluate the effects of conservation systems and conservation practices in reducing or preventing agricultural nonpoint source pollution.



*Stripcropping helps maintain water quality by holding water and soil on the land.*





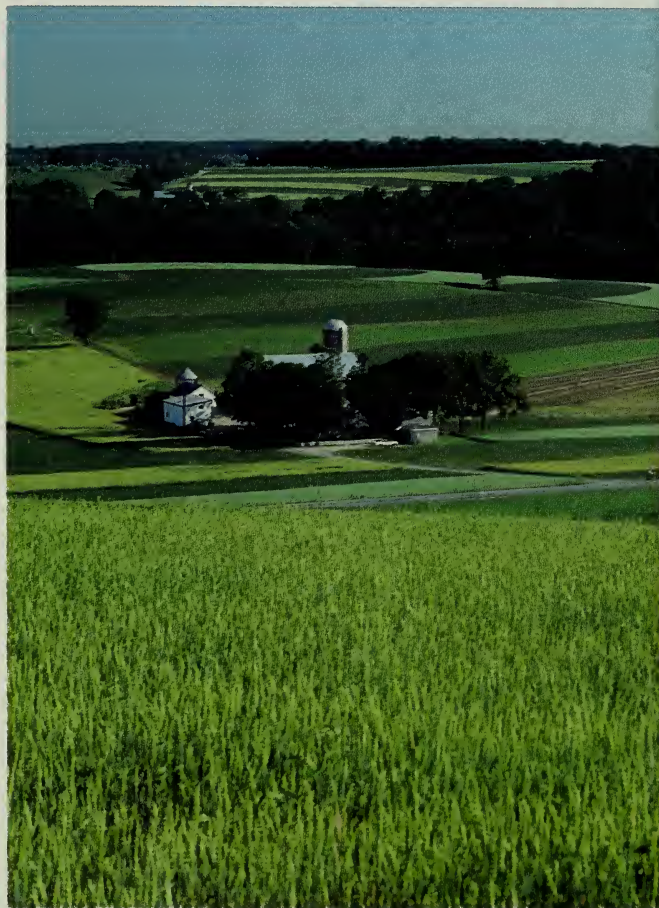
## The SCS 5-Year Water Quality Plan includes the following action elements:

### 1. Hydrologic Units

The primary focus is on hydrologic units (selected agricultural watershed or aquifer recharge areas). Hydrologic unit planning and treatment is a coordinated effort by Federal, State, and local agencies and includes public involvement.

These units are to provide extra resources in areas where significant water quality concerns exist. Progress in reducing

nonpoint source pollution in each unit will be assessed by computer-model estimates of the water quality benefits of the conservation treatments used in the area. The information gathered will provide a basis for expanding application to other areas with similar water quality problems. USDA's water quality initiative calls for up to 275 hydrologic unit areas. The number of these units is based on appropriations provided by Congress.



*Hydrologic unit areas incorporate a system of interrelated conservation practices to help reduce nonpoint source pollution.*



## 2. Demonstration Projects

Demonstration projects operated under the joint leadership of SCS and the Cooperative Extension System will represent a variety of agricultural, soil, and geologic conditions. By demonstrating available technology and transferring it to areas in need, these projects should persuade farmers and ranchers to adopt the demonstrated conservation systems.

Demonstration projects are selected to show the effectiveness of newly developed conservation practices in treating nonpoint source pollution problems and to promote the use of these practices in other areas. The newest and best information is being used to implement cost-effective production systems that meet the cooperating farmer's or rancher's water quality goals. The water quality initiative calls for 24 demonstration projects representing different sets of agricultural, soil, and geological conditions.



*One of 16 Demonstration Projects, ENG-LAND Acres dairy farm near Frederick, MD, shows how conservation assistance can have a positive effect on water quality.*

### **3. Technology Development**

Technology development is a crucial element of the Department's water quality and quantity objective. Improved technology means better technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and policy officials and more efficient program management. Updating and strengthening field office technical guides with the best available technical information and other educational resources is an essential part of technology development.

### **4. Information Projects**

Information and education materials will be available to help rural and urban people with water quality and quantity problems and raise their awareness of rural and urban effects on the Nation's water supply.

The information will:

- Provide SCS field offices with examples of successes in reducing water quality problems.
- Promote voluntary action in the agricultural community.
- Encourage agencies, farm organizations, farmers and ranchers, and rural and urban dwellers to work together to develop local solutions to any existing water quality problems.

### **5. Regional Projects**

SCS will accelerate ongoing technical assistance to multi-State regional projects that include water quality treatment objectives. This assistance will further the development of plans to manage nonpoint source pollution, including systems of conservation practices, to meet the water quality objectives.



Water Quality and  
Quantity  
for the 90's



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Soil Conservation Service

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